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Wuthering Heights

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Wuthering Heights

by
Emily Brontë

Wuthering Heights is the only novel by Emily Brontë (1818-48), one of three sisters whose literary productions caused a minor sensation when they began appearing in the late 1840s. Born to Patrick Brontë, a Yorkshire clergyman, and his wife Maria, Emily, Anne, and Charlotte Brontë were precocious readers and writers. The three sisters spent years writing for their own pleasure and amusement, then published a volume of poetry in 1846. Fearing that the volume's reception would be biased if the authors were known to be women, the sisters adopted the names of Ellis (Emily), Acton (Anne), and Currer (Charlotte) Brontë. Their poems did not sell well but garnered some positive reviews—Ellis Bell's poems were said by one critic to demonstrate "a fine quaint spirit . . . which may have things to speak that man will be glad to hear" (Allott, p. 61). The following year *Wuthering Heights* was published as the first two volumes of a three-volume set, which also included Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*. *Wuthering Heights* was initially overshadowed by the greater acclaim that greeted Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* published earlier that same year, but has since been recognized as a great work in its own right. Emily Brontë died of tuberculosis in December 1848, barely a year after the publication of *Wuthering Heights*. Her novel, recognized as an original masterpiece soon after her death, involves issues of slavery, family relationships, and gender in ways that remain fresh and provocative.

THE LITERARY WORK

A novel set in the West Riding of Yorkshire at the turn of the nineteenth century; published in 1847.

SYNOPSIS

Two families become entangled in a web of interrelations through blood and marriage over a 30-year period.

Events in History at the Time the Novel Takes Place

The chaos of revolution. *Wuthering Heights* takes place between 1771 and 1802, an era that saw rapid political, social, and economic change in England as well as the development of Romantic literature. Politically, the period experienced the momentous American and French Revolutions. While England's loss of its 13 American colonies and its subsequent struggle to contain the threat of the French Revolution have no direct analogues in *Wuthering Heights*, there is an indirect influence. The increasing social mobility and democratization associated with these political movements evoke anxiety in the novel's landed gentry, among whom Heathcliff may be seen as an almost allegorical figure for the chaos of revolution. Equally significant to the novel are the slow abolition of slavery in England and a

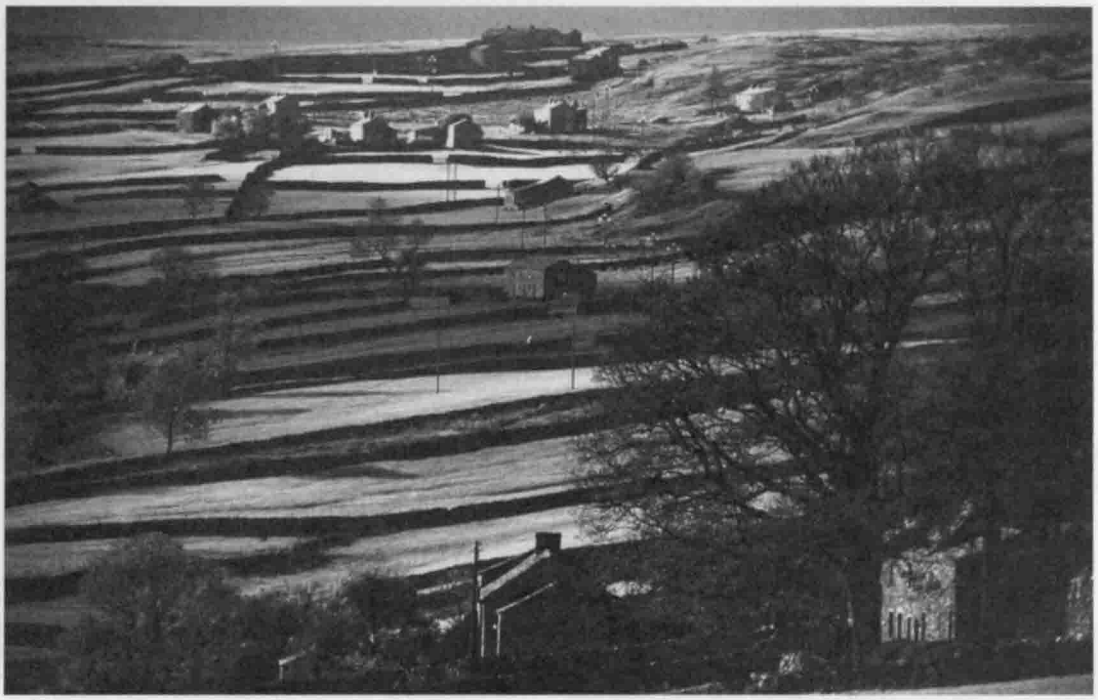
The Brontë family's parsonage and adjoining cemetery.

shifting understanding of the nature of marriage and the family.

Social mobility. The basis of the English class system before the nineteenth century was land, which conveyed both money and status. Society protected the commodity through the dual practices of primogeniture and entail. Primogeniture, the inheritance of land by the eldest son (or closest male relative) in a family, ensured that estates would remain intact and within the family. Entail restricted an heir's disposal of an estate, usually through a legal contract that prohibited two generations of heirs from selling off the land they inherited. Primogeniture ensures that the *Wuthering Heights* character Edgar Linton will inherit Thrushcross Grange on his father's death, and that on his own subsequent death the estate will pass to his nephew, Linton Heathcliff, rather than to his own daughter. Conversely, the lack of an entail allows another character, the unrelated Heathcliff, to acquire Wuthering Heights before two generations pass. In the first generation, the son apparently mortgages the property to Heathcliff in payment of gambling debts; when the son dies with the debt unpaid, the unentailed property passes to Heathcliff.

Over the course of the eighteenth century new means to wealth began to develop through industry and manufacturing. The value attached to land shifted with the ascendancy of those new means, with land becoming more a marker of status than the path to one's fortune. The increased social mobility of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries produced anxiety among the landed gentry, who saw their status as social leaders challenged—and, sometimes, their land acquired—by the newly wealthy capitalists. In the novel Heathcliff becomes mysteriously wealthy during his time away from Wuthering Heights, then consolidates his wealth and status by acquiring the property after Hindley Earnshaw's death. With Heathcliff's acquisition of the land comes the status of gentleman that the narrator unhesitatingly accords him.

Slavery. Although African slavery was never as significant to the English domestic economy as to the plantation economies of the Americas, England had been a dominant player in the slave trade since the mid-1600s. Liverpool, the port city where Mr. Earnshaw picks up Heathcliff at the beginning of the novel, was a major participant in the slave trade, with more than three-quarters of the English traffic in slaves (which comprised at least 55 percent of the worldwide market) passing through its port by the turn of the nineteenth century. In the "Liverpool Triangle," manufactured goods from England were traded for West African slaves, who were, in turn, traded to the Caribbean for sugar, molasses, and rum.



Emily Brontë drew upon her native Haworth, Yorkshire, for the setting of *Wuthering Heights*.

In 1772—just after the action of *Wuthering Heights* begins—the abolitionist movement marked one of its first legal victories in England with the Mansfield decision. A slave named James Somerset, who had fought his forcible return to the colonies, was granted the right to remain in England. While the decision did not abolish slavery, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's claim that slavery was inconsistent with English law began the process. The abolitionist movement gained ground in England in the later eighteenth century; part of a larger religious awakening, the movement was influenced especially by the Society of Friends (Quakers), who presented the first petition for abolishing the slave trade to Parliament in 1783, and by Methodism, which broke away from the Church of England to form a separate denomination in 1784. Slavery continued to exist through the time of the novel. It would not be abolished until 1833, after England had abolished the slave trade in 1807. In *Wuthering Heights* the unknown origins of Heathcliff, his mysteriously dark complexion, and his position within the Earnshaw family all suggest that he may be a freed slave or the child of a slave, brought to the forbidding Yorkshire moors by Mr. Earnshaw.

The family. During the eighteenth century in England the shape of the family was changing considerably. In England's precapitalist aristocratic and feudal society, the family had been seen as a network of obligations, beginning with the members of a household or an estate, but often including more distant relatives and connections, even servants. While ties of blood and marriage formed the basis of the family, they were not determinative; a male child, for example, could be adopted and made heir. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the development of industrial capitalism and the growth of Protestantism, with its emphasis on the individual, encouraged a new way of thinking about the family. Capitalism increased the potential for social mobility, so the family decreased in importance as an instrument of class movement. Therefore, marriage, adoption, and fosterage, which had previously been among the few means of social ascent, lost some of their significance as building blocks of society. At the same time, the concept of romantic love as a basis for marriage became increasingly viable. With the rise of the middle class, and a social system not based exclusively on land holdings to be preserved or in-

creased through marriage, love gained a more prominent role in the development of family. During the eighteenth century, then, the family began to contract into our more contemporary way of thinking about it as a nuclear group, bound primarily by blood and love rather than law and obligation.

Wuthering Heights involves a shifting sense of both family and marriage. The waif Heathcliff is brought into the family by Mr. Earnshaw, a representative of the older generation, who might be expected to think of the family as expansive, able to incorporate new members easily; on Earnshaw's death, the family constricts to a smaller, nuclear group, expelling Heathcliff and relegating him to the status of servant. Perhaps more importantly, the issue of love matches dominates the plot, from Hindley's surprise marriage to Frances, to Heathcliff's "romantic" elopement with Isabella, to Catherine Linton's marriage to Hareton. Catherine Earnshaw embodies the shift: romantically attracted to Heathcliff, she prudently and contractually marries Edgar Linton instead, hoping that marriage and love can be kept separate. In her case they cannot, with tragic consequences.

THE SOMERSET CASE

Purchased in Virginia, the slave James Somerset accompanied his owner, Charles Stewart, to England in 1769. After two years in England, Somerset left Stewart's service without permission and refused to return. Incensed, Stewart had Somerset seized and remanded to a ship's commander to be conveyed to Jamaica for sale there. Somerset's friends complained to the English court system that the slave was confined in chains onboard a ship ready to sail for Jamaica, and the case became a cause célébre. A writ of habeas corpus was brought against the captain, forcing him to release Somerset and bring him to court. On the fifth day of the trial Lord Mansfield delivered the decision:

> No master ever was allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad because he deserted from his service, or for any other reason whatever; we cannot say, the cause set forth by this return is allowed or approved by the laws of this Kingdom, and therefore the man must be discharged.
>
> (Mansfield in Shyllon, pp. 109-10)

Public opinion rested on the side of Somerset. His lawyer got a standing ovation at the end of the trial, while during it the opposing lawyer was jeered—but slavery in England continued: "blacks were still hunted and kidnapped in the streets of London, Bristol, and Liverpool; hateful advertisements still appeared in the papers for the sale of blacks" (Shyllon, p. 174).

The Novel in Focus

Plot summary. As the novel begins, Lockwood, a Londoner, has rented a house—"Thrushcross Grange"—in a rural area in Yorkshire. He rents it from a Mr. Heathcliff, who lives at a house some four miles distant, Wuthering Heights. Lockwood visits his landlord at Wuthering Heights and is forced to stay the night when a snowstorm obscures the guideposts along his route home. Intrigued by some books he finds in his bedroom, he dreams of the girl who owned them; she seems to be variously named Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff, or Catherine Linton. Suddenly Lockwood screams at the apparition of a child; his nightmare awakens the household, and Heathcliff turns him out of the room. Returning to the Grange the next day, Lockwood enlists the housekeeper, Nelly Dean, to tell him Catherine's story. The bulk of the novel consists of Nelly's tale.

As Lockwood learns, Catherine Earnshaw (Cathy I) was the daughter of Nelly's late master, a Mr. Earnshaw, former owner of Wuthering Heights. Earnshaw had adopted Heathcliff as a child, after encountering him on the streets of Liverpool. Catherine and Heathcliff become inseparable as children, and Heathcliff displaces Catherine's brother, Hindley, in their father's affections as well. Their idyllic childhood is interrupted, however, first by the father's death and then by Catherine's sojourn at the Grange, where she meets Edgar and Isabella Linton.

Hindley Earnshaw, now grown, returns for his father's funeral, inheriting Wuthering Heights. His wife gives birth to a son, Hareton, and dies, after which Hindley grows increasingly dissolute. Under Hindley's regime, Heathcliff and Catherine go their separate ways. While he is relegated to servitude, she becomes increasingly "gentrified"; she dresses in fine clothes and worries about keeping her hands clean, rather than running wild on the moors like before. Her association with the Lintons—their manners, dress, and education—draws Catherine away from Heathcliff, who leaves Wuthering Heights when he overhears her telling Nelly the housekeeper that Edgar has proposed to her. What he does

GENEALOGY OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Wuthering Heights includes potentially confusing sets of names, both identical (Catherine I and II) and similar (Hindley, Hareton, Heathcliff). This confusion is compounded by the two Catherines' marital choices: Catherine Earnshaw (Cathy I) becomes Catherine Linton; her daughter, Catherine Linton (Cathy II), becomes Catherine Heathcliff and, prospectively by the novel's end, Catherine Earnshaw. The following developments outline the eighteenth-century Earnshaw family history:

Parents—Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw

Son	**Daughter**	**Foster son**
Hindley	**Catherine**	**Heathcliff**
(1757-84)	(1765-84)	(b. 1764; adopted 1771)
marries Francis and	marries Edgar Linton	marries Isabella Linton
they have a son	and has a daughter,	and they have a son
named Hareton	Catherine Linton	named Linton Heathcliff

Catherine Linton marries her cousin Linton Heathcliff in 1801; he dies soon after. Her marriage to her other cousin, Hareton Earnshaw, is projected for New Year's Day of 1803. (Adapted from Sanger in Sale and Dunn, p. 331)

not catch is her assertion that she and Heathcliff will always be one; she considers her planned marriage irrelevant to her feelings for Heathcliff.

Three years pass, during which we hear nothing of Heathcliff's whereabouts. Nelly raises Hindley's son, Hareton, then moves to the Grange with Catherine on her marriage to Edgar. Heathcliff returns, as mysteriously as he has disappeared, and disrupts both families. He becomes a divisive force between Edgar and Catherine, and lives at the Heights with Hindley and Hareton Earnshaw. Rumor has it that he has won property from Hindley by gambling with him. Edgar's sister, Isabella, finds herself attracted to Heathcliff, though Catherine warns her against him. Disregarding the warning, Isabella elopes with Heathcliff and, after two months, they return to take up residence at Wuthering Heights.

Isabella grows almost immediately disillusioned with her choice. Heathcliff proves brutal and cruel; he has clearly married her because she is her brother's heir. When Catherine dies giving birth to a daughter, Catherine Linton (Cathy II), Isabella escapes from Heathcliff and flees to London, where she gives birth to a son, Linton Heathcliff. Although divorce was rare and extremely difficult in the period, and children of separated parents were legally the property of the father, Heathcliff does not pursue his wife, and Edgar presumably helps to support Isabella in hiding. Soon after Linton's birth, Hindley dies, and Heathcliff acquires Wuthering Heights through the mortgage he has held in payment of Hindley's gambling debts.

Almost 13 years pass. Nelly continues as a servant at the Grange, where Edgar is raising his daughter in relative isolation. At about 13, Cathy II is out rambling on the moors when she meets her cousin Hareton for the first time. Shortly thereafter, a report of Isabella's death reaches Edgar, who goes to London to bring Linton Heathcliff, her son, back to the Grange. Heathcliff demands to raise the child himself, and after a brief meeting of the cousins at the Grange, Linton is returned to the Heights.

Almost three years pass before the cousins see each other again. Linton is an invalid who has received little care at the Heights, but Heathcliff encourages him to correspond with Catherine II. Though Edgar disapproves, the correspondence continues in secret. When Nelly falls ill, and is thus unable to monitor Catherine's movements, Catherine begins to visit the Heights every evening, developing a deeper connection with Linton. By this time, Edgar's health is failing; clearly Heathcliff is trying to engineer a marriage between Catherine and Linton so that when Edgar dies, Linton (as Catherine's husband) will inherit Edgar's property, making it part of Linton's holdings, hold-

ings that sickly Linton has already willed to his father. When the cousins meet, however, Linton is querulous and selfish.

Catherine comes for a final visit, chaperoned by Nelly. Locking Nelly into an upper room, Heathcliff prevents Catherine from returning home until she marries Linton. She does so, and Heathcliff releases Nelly, who returns to the Grange to find Edgar dying. Catherine escapes and meets her father one last time before his death; she then returns to Wuthering Heights to nurse her new husband. Nelly remains at the Grange as housekeeper.

Linton Heathcliff dies within months of his marriage, and all his property (including the Grange) passes to Heathcliff. This, then, is the situation at the beginning of the narrative: Heathcliff owns both houses, occupying one and renting the other to Lockwood. Hareton and Catherine live at the Heights, relegated by Heathcliff to servant status, as he had earlier been by Hareton's father, Hindley. Nelly's whole narrative stirs a romantic interest in Lockwood for Catherine, but, dissuaded by both her temper and the forbidding nature of the landscape, he returns to London.

Almost a year later, Lockwood takes a hunting trip to the area and decides to stay briefly at the Grange. Surprised not to find Nelly there, he learns that she now lives at Wuthering Heights. He ambles over to find the place considerably changed: flowers are growing in the yard, the kitchen is bright, and Cathy II and Hareton are sharing a book. He hears the conclusion of the story from Nelly: Heathcliff has died, apparently willing himself to death in order to join Cathy I, whose ghost haunted Lockwood on his first arrival but seemingly never appeared to Heathcliff. He has been buried next to her. Cathy II has taken an interest in Hareton, and through their shared opposition to Heathcliff and interest in books (she has taught him to read) they have forged a bond that will end, Nelly triumphantly informs Lockwood, in a marriage that will reunite the two households.

Who is Heathcliff? *Wuthering Heights* can best be viewed through the lens of Heathcliff's identity. He enters the novel as a foundling, carried under Mr. Earnshaw's coat from Liverpool with no history, no name, no language: "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk . . . [repeating] over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand" (Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, pp. 36-37). Earnshaw gives him the name of a son who had died, thus marking him as a member of the family; significantly, however, Earnshaw does not give the boy the family surname as well. Thus, like a slave or a pet, Heathcliff has only one name.

As suggested, critics have recently posited that Heathcliff may not be just like a slave, he may literally be one, or a freed slave. After all, he is picked up in Liverpool, a major port on the slave trade, and he is consistently described as physically dark, mysterious, and "other" than the Earnshaws and Lintons among whom he lives. He is "black and cross" in Catherine Earnshaw's eyes, and Nelly compares him to "a regular black" (*Wuthering Heights*, pp. 53, 57). His dark skin suggests some other genealogies as well: he is referred to as a "Lascar," a "gipsy," and "an American or Spanish castaway"; the latter reference to castaways may again refer to the slave trade (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 50).

But it is not only Heathcliff's looks and his provenance that suggest an originally African heritage. The language of ownership and property permeates the novel, as when Catherine, in her dying delirium, says "that is not *my* Heathcliff," or when old Mr. Linton refers to him as "that strange acquisition my late neighbor made in his journey to Liverpool" (*Wuthering Heights*, pp. 159, 50). And when Isabella Linton asks Nelly, "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man?" her language reflects the tendency of the nineteenth-century English to question the humanity of their African slaves (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 134). Identifying Heathcliff as a slave allows us to see in Brontë's novel a critique of the practice of slavery, still legal, as pointed out, at the time the novel is set. One central argument against slavery was that the practice degraded not only the slave, but also the master, both by association with a racial "inferior" and by the unjust exercise of power. In this case, Heathcliff's presence clearly degrades both Hindley and Hindley's son Hareton, who are not only under his thumb, but rendered "savage" by their constant association with him; Heathcliff takes pride in his manipulation and destruction of the father and his near-ruin of the son. His own son, Linton, furthermore, has all sorts of congenital weaknesses. There was a widespread belief at the time that children of interracial relationships, or miscegenation, were intellectually and physically weaker than the general population.

Actually, from an 1840s perspective, Heathcliff may be as much Irish as he is African. During this decade, Liverpool became a magnet for Irish refugees, who began flooding the city in

1845 during the Great Famine (1845-49). Emily's older brother, Branwell Brontë, had visited Liverpool in August 1845, just before she began writing the novel, and would have returned to Haworth with tales of the ragged Irish children pouring into the city. Nineteenth-century English stereotypes about the Irish are strikingly similar to those of the African—both, for example, were thought of as dark, curly-haired, and passionate. The Irish, like Africans, functioned as a racial "other" to the Victorian English. Thus, Heathcliff's "otherness" may stem as much from the Liverpool that Brontë heard about after her brother's sojourn as from the Liverpool of earlier years, as much from working-class Irish emigration as from the African slave trade.

There is a question not only of Heathcliff's background but also of his genuine role in the novel. Absent for three years, he returns a wealthy and polished young man, soon insinuating himself into the Linton household as well as gaining possession of Wuthering Heights. Could he be the father of the child Cathy I dies after bearing? As Nelly makes clear, Catherine Linton (Cathy II), is born just about seven months after Heathcliff's return. This would make Cathy II illegitimate and (if so) her marriage to Linton Heathcliff, Heathcliff's son by Isabella, incestuous—for he would be her half-brother.

Speculations about identity are necessary for an understanding of the tightly structured narrative, which doubles back on itself and returns, again and again, to the same few characters, the same few questions. Brontë's novel does not, ever, explicitly condemn African slavery, bemoan the increasingly restricted structure of the family, or name a father or a race for Heathcliff. Yet by focusing the action of the novel on this mysterious creature, this "cuckoo," as Nelly calls him, the novel insistently forces our attention to these issues (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 35).

Heathcliff represents a threat to the orderly society of Wuthering Heights. His status—as servant or slave, family member or interloper—is continually at issue in the novel. Brontë represents the anxiety of the gentry over the period's new social mobility in the Lintons' distaste for Heathcliff. Ultimately, however, the little society of the novel is able to accommodate change, as indeed the larger English society did at the time, through slow generational shifts rather than revolutionary upheaval. England in the nineteenth century prided itself on the prudent constitutional and social change that helped it avoid the revolutions that swept the continent, beginning with the French Revolution and continuing through the 1840s; the society of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange reenacts this evolutionary change in microcosm.

Sources and literary context. Emily Brontë was surprisingly well read for the daughter of a country clergyman whose forebears were illiterate Irish peasants. She and her sisters were particularly fond of the English Romantic poet George Gordon, Lord Byron, whose poems (see ***Don Juan***, also in *WLAIT 3: British and Irish Literature and It Times*) feature alienated heroes often thought to be precursors to Heathcliff. Byron's poem "Manfred" may be a particularly apt precursor, as the protagonist's alienation stems at least in part from his remorse over what appears to be an incestuous relationship with his sister, Astarte, who may have killed herself. Manfred's dark brooding marks him as a prototypical "Byronic hero," a character type that quickly became a target of both imitation and parody in early-nineteenth-century writing. Brontë's Heathcliff in many ways demonstrates the dangers of Byronism: her Heathcliff seems less remorseful, indeed less sympathetic generally, than any of Byron's heroes, and his actions are directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of at least four characters in the novel, not including himself.

The Romantic movement generally privileged feelings above logic or reason, and often emphasized the individual's emotional response to the environment. Emily Brontë has gained a reputation in this regard for being the most "Romantic" of the Brontë sisters because her novel is firmly rooted in a specific landscape that provides more than simple "local color." The Yorkshire landscape that animates *Wuthering Heights* is grim and foreboding, like many of the people who inhabit it.

A folklore revival in the eighteenth century affected the Romantic movement, and evidence of it surfaces in *Wuthering Heights*, which has sources in local legend and lore. Brontë absorbed these sources especially from the family servant, Tabitha Aykroyd (known as Tabby). Critics have noted parallels between certain familiar ballads and the themes of the novel, especially those ballads that take up the doomed passion of high-born ladies for "gypsy lovers" and other outcast souls. One such ballad, "Johnny Faa," involves a woman who abandons her husband for her gypsy lover, claiming—like Cathy I on her deathbed—"my lord shall nae mair come near me" (Smith, p. 507). Since ballads, unlike the realistic novels

of mid-century England, easily incorporate the supernatural, the links are compelling. Cathy I appears to Lockwood as a ghost, and one of Nelly's closing comments to Lockwood is that the ghosts of Cathy I and Heathcliff have been spotted—she reports that a little boy has told her "They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder" (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 333). These supernatural elements enter the novel without extensive commentary or apology, and unlike many "supernatural" occurrences in the Gothic fiction of the time, they are not explained away by later events. Though Nelly dismisses the boy's report, she admits that she, like him, fears to pass the site where the ghosts have been seen.

Events in History at the Time the Novel Was Written

The working class. Throughout the early part of the nineteenth century the growth and development of industrial capitalism brought about the beginnings of a working-class movement. In England, the People's Charter (1838) and the associated movement known as Chartism called for working-class political rights: the right to vote, to organize, to strike. While the Reform Bill of 1832 had extended the franchise to allow some middle-class males (white property-owners only) to vote, the People's Charter demanded universal suffrage and posed a serious threat to middle-class stability. Heathcliff's unknown origins and his original status as a servant mark him as a member of this threatening class, and indeed his presence does pose a significant threat to the stability of life at both Wuthering Heights and the Grange. As Daniel Pool notes, Yorkshire's isolated farmsteads were among the last in England to give up the practice of having servants actually live with the family, as Nelly and Heathcliff do (Pool, p. 159). From an 1845 point of view, Heathcliff at least can be seen as a disgruntled worker whose residence in the household increases the class anxiety already evidenced in the novel.

Gender in Victorian England. The Victorian period saw the birth of the women's movement, a response to the overwhelming legal and social strictures under which women labored in the nineteenth century. Yet England from the period of 1837 to 1901 was governed by a queen. This central paradox informs all ideas about gender in the nineteenth century. Although it is true that the most powerful person in the realm was a woman, she was the exception to prove the rule. In fact, in 1847, women, especially married women, had almost no legal standing whatsoever. They could not vote, own property, testify in court, or, in most cases, retain custody of their children in the unlikely event of separation or divorce. Divorce was extremely rare for middle-class women, requiring an act of Parliament or a religious annulment, and marriage was one of the few "occupations" open to them, besides writer, teacher, or governess (all of which the Brontës tried).

From being the ward of her father, the female became almost literally the possession of her husband after marriage. English marriage law determined that a woman's personal property became her husband's on marriage. Her own political person was absorbed into her husband's by the practice of "coverture," in which the wife is metaphorically "covered" by her husband, making them, in the language of the marriage service, "one flesh." Her children were, legally, the property of her husband (until 1839, when limited custody rights were granted to women). These legal issues are raised implicitly throughout the novel. Most obviously, Heathcliff imprisons Cathy II at the Heights in order to force her marriage to his son, whom he controls, so that her property will become Linton's and eventually his. Soon after the marriage Linton boasts to Nelly, "Catherine always spoke of it [the Grange] as *her* house. It isn't hers! It's mine—papa says everything she has is mine" (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 177).

The legal oppression of women in the period was matched, however, by a growing cultural idealization of them. Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House," a poem of the 1850s, embodies the mid-Victorian ideal of woman: proper, domestic, and utterly devoted to hearth, home, and husband. Nineteenth-century women were furthermore regarded as moral arbiters and guides, placed on a pedestal of piety. But a woman's political and legal rights were considered irrelevant, the conviction being that they were amply represented by her husband, while he relied on her to regulate his household and moral status.

Brontë's novel steers a middle course between Catherine's uninhibited behavior and her daughter's domestic imprisonment, between freedom from propriety and the status of property. Cathy II is not a domestic "angel," as Victorian ideology of Brontë's own time would have her be; her porridge has lumps in it, and she is a hostile host-

ess at best. Yet she "domesticates" Hareton, teaching him to read and encouraging him to help her plant flowers. And, significantly, she safeguards home and hearth, a primary duty for the Victorian woman, for she restores her family's property. Married to Hareton, Cathy II will once again inhabit the family home of Wuthering Heights. As maternal teacher and domestic beautifier, Catherine II steps into the socially sanctioned roles for the Victorian woman, stopping short of chafing at her limitations, as her mother so clearly did.

Reception. Early reviews of *Wuthering Heights* were mixed. Most praised the originality and power of the novel, but condemned its coarseness, vulgarity, and even depravity. Typical of these mixed responses is an unsigned review in the *Examiner:* "This is a strange book. It is not without evidences of considerable power: but, as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable; and the people who make up the drama, which is tragic enough in its consequences, are savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer" (Allott, p. 220). The same critic, like many others, focuses on Heathcliff as "the hero of the book, if a hero there be. He is an incarnation of evil qualities; implacable hate, ingratitude, cruelty, falsehood, selfishness, and revenge" (Allott, p. 220). Early critics frequently noted connections to Byron, to "those irregular German tales in which the writers, giving the reins to their fancy, represent personages as swayed and impelled to evil by supernatural influences" (Allott, pp. 220, 223).

After Emily's death, Charlotte Brontë published a new edition of *Wuthering Heights* in 1850; in this edition she wrote a note that set the tone for new appraisals of the novel thereafter. She emphasizes the "rude and strange" qualities of the work, but defends them as appropriate to the Yorkshire setting and the genius of her sister (C. Brontë in Allott, p. 284). Later critics like W.C. Roscoe concur, claiming, "in force of genius, in the power of conceiving and uttering intensity of passion, Emily surpassed her sister Charlotte. On the other hand, her range seems to have been still more confined" (Roscoe in Allott, p. 348). Poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote to a friend that it was "the first novel I've read for an age, and the best (as regards power and sound style) for two ages, except *Sidonia* [by Johann Wilhelm Meinhold, translated into English in 1844]" (Rossetti in Allott, p. 300). Matthew Arnold's 1855 elegy for Emily Brontë, "Haworth Churchyard," provides a fitting final commentary on the novel and its author:

> . . . She—
> (How shall I sing her?)—whose soul
> Knew no fellow for might,
> Passion, vehemence, grief,
> Daring, since Byron died,
> That world-fam'd Son of Fire; She who sank
> Baffled, unknown, self-consum'd;
> Whose too-bold dying song
> Shook, like a clarion blast, my soul.
> (Arnold in Allott, pp. 309-10)

—Elisabeth Rose Gruner

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